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MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS

CA Senate District 26

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**Statement for Funeral Services for Augustus F. Hawkins from
Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas (D-Los Angeles), Chair-elect of the California Legislative
Black Caucus**

"The life and death of the Honorable Augustus "Gus" Hawkins reads like a history lesson in the advancement of the rights of African Americans, the poor, and workers during the 20th Century," said Senator Mark Ridley Thomas (D-Los Angeles) and Chair-elect of the California Legislative Black Caucus.

"I knew Mr. Hawkins in the context of my service as the Executive Director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in the mid-1980s," Ridley-Thomas said. "We presented him with the Drum Major Award at the Annual Martin Luther King Award Dinner.

"As a pioneering black legislator in California and in Congress, he targeted insidious institutional racism and generational poverty and succeeded in creating legislation that assisted all Americans in obtaining a better quality of life," said Ridley-Thomas. "He was stellar in dignity, impressive in his bearing and left a strong impression on me.

"Mr. Hawkins was a fearless crusader for his South Los Angeles constituents, being elected to the legislature in 1934. As early as the 1930s, he discouraged African Americans from shopping at Los Angeles businesses where they could not work. He was elected to Congress in 1962 and was assigned to the Education and Labor Committee.

"There he left a legislative legacy that includes a major role in drafting the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed racial discrimination in employment and created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. He also authored the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act and the Pregnancy Disability Act of 1978, which created and protected jobs for youth and pregnant women respectively.

"As the Chairman of the Education and Labor Committee, he played a crucial role in overriding a veto by then President Ronald Reagan that allowed the establishment of the Civil Rights Restoration Act, which specified that federal agencies, school and organizations receiving federal funds must comply with civil rights laws in all areas.

"He is best known for authoring the Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978, known as the Humphrey-Hawkins Act. However, he also succeeded in restoring an honorable discharge for the 167 black Twenty-fifth Infantry Regiment of the U.S. Army after they were falsely accused of creating a public disturbance in Brownsville, Texas in 1906.

"As a co-founder of the Congressional Black Caucus, he fostered a united front for black legislators, who throughout this state and nation must pay homage to this soft-spoken, yet powerful statesman who paved the way and set the bar high for all of us."

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